

8-85/4/a

Colonel Andrew J. Goodpaster, Jr.
The White House

Dear Colonel Goodpaster:

The attached paper is in answer to your memorandum of 1 December 1956 forwarding the President's request for information on the Yugoslav government's attitudes toward the religious beliefs of its citizens.

Respectfully,

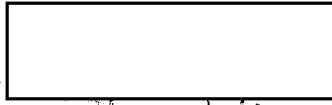
Allen W. Dulles
Director

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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY to the Director

Yugoslav Government's Attitude Toward Religion

Yugoslavia's Communist government has attempted to eliminate rapidly all religious influences among Communist party members and, "in the next generation or two" among the entire populace. The regime is relying mainly on Communist indoctrination of the youth to do this.

The government maintains an uneasy relationship with the largest church in Yugoslavia--the Serbian Orthodox--interrupted by sporadic attempts to subdue it further as by the sentencing two years ago of one of its major bishops to a long prison term for "anti-state" activity. The major efforts of the Communists, however, have been devoted to restricting the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. These have been greatest in Croatia, where both the hierarchy and beliefs of the communicants are strong, and the church itself closely associated with separatist, "national" anti-Serb sentiments. Slightly lesser efforts have been devoted to Slovenia. The regime has tried to undercut the church hierarchy through sponsoring priests associations, with some success in Slovenia but almost none in Croatia.

Outright persecution of the clergy has diminished, although sporadic trials still take place. The government closed two seminaries recently, convicting the members of the faculties on such charges as plotting for an independent Croatia and glorifying the war-time Croatian fascist leader, Ante Pavelic. Since 1951, Cardinal Stepinac has been out of jail but confined to his native village of Krasic, allowed to celebrate mass but engage in no other church activities.

In general, religious services and instruction of the young are still carried on within the churches without outright interference, although secret police are often present during masses to check on any political content in the sermons. In general, the people are not penalized outright for religious affiliations except where Communist orthodoxy is a requirement for a position--such as Army officers. In many cases, however, church affiliation is concealed to avoid possible discrimination by local authorities. The Communist party announced in 1954 that it had dropped many tens of thousands of its own members because of religious activities.